

Aldro

PREP

South East

ALDRO ●●

Lombard Street, Shackleford, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6AS
Website aldro.org

Head Chris Carlier Pupils 235
day and boarding: 174 boys, 61
girls Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day:
£7,985; boarding: £10,365

In the 'utterly charming' village of Shackleford lies Aldro: single-sex until two years ago but now – since girls joined in a transition that was noted as particularly smooth – firmly co-ed. And under the dynamic leadership of head Chris Carlier and his wife Nicky, it has gone from strength

to strength, with parents very much involved in school life. ('Everyone is made to feel part of the family,' according to one.) Each pupil gets a turn to dress up either as a peasant or a soldier at a 'wonderfully eccentric' annual re-enactment of the English Civil War run by the head of history, and all are 'able to go at quite a speed' academically. But there's also a healthy focus on extracurriculars: an impressive 89 per cent of pupils learn a musical instrument, and the sport-for-all ethos encourages everyone to represent the school in matches.

With a rock-star head who's been known to leap into the school lake in his finest suit, Cottesmore School is seriously fun

BRAMBLETYE ●●

Lewes Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 3PD
Website brambletye.co.uk

Head William Brooks Pupils 311
day and boarding: 161 boys, 150
girls Ages 2–13 Term Fees Day:
£8,275; boarding: £10,330

When asked what makes this prep school unique, one visitor's answers were all extraordinarily special: 'pink blazers, homemade trebuchets and the didgeridoo club'. Set in 140 acres of the Ashdown Forest, housed in a former hunting lodge, Brambletye is thriving under the leadership of William Brooks, (who rewards good lunchtime manners with a place at his table) and its spunky, hard-working and kind pupils have achieved more than 200 art scholarships in the last 20 years. Parents love the pre-match, Saturday-morning breakfasts of smoothies and bacon sandwiches; likewise the annual Burns Night Dinner, which sees some of them reeling or singing in their own choir.

BRUERN ABBEY ●

Chesterton, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 1UY
Website bruernabbey.org
Head John Floyd Pupils 155
day and boarding boys
Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day:
£10,220; boarding: £12,295

Known to pupils as a 'busy man' who 'runs a tight ship but in a relaxed manner', head John Floyd transforms the lives of dyslexic boys – all flexi- or weekly-boarders – who've had their confidence knocked elsewhere. There are enormous amounts of fun and games at this Oxfordshire gem, which is definitely not for the mud-averse, and the food is legendary. (Think sushi night, the oyster club and German night, when every table is provided with a huge gingerbread house for the boys to smash before devouring.) Meanwhile, there's no longer any need to stress about next steps, as Bruern Abbey has opened a fabulous senior school in Chilton, Buckinghamshire, that steers neuro-diverse boys to GCSE success.

CALDICOTT ●

Crown Lane, Farnham Royal, Buckinghamshire SL2 3SL
Website caldicott.com

Head Jeremy Banks Pupils 245
day and boarding boys
Ages 7–13 Term Fees Day:
£7,936; boarding: £13,265

Head Jeremy Banks is 'motivating', according to his pupils, who love that Caldicott can give them a country-prep-style experience only 20-odd miles from Notting Hill. The ethos is 'sports for all', with the chance to compete in golf, cricket and basketball tournaments. Not that creativity comes second: the new head of art has raised the funds for a pottery kiln; and one child exhibited their work at the Saatchi Gallery. Academic standards are stellar, too. A new eTec curriculum combines technology, engineering and computing with a big dose of entrepreneurship; and the latter pays off, to judge by the tangential success of the charity committee in the academic year of 2021-22. It raised £54,000!